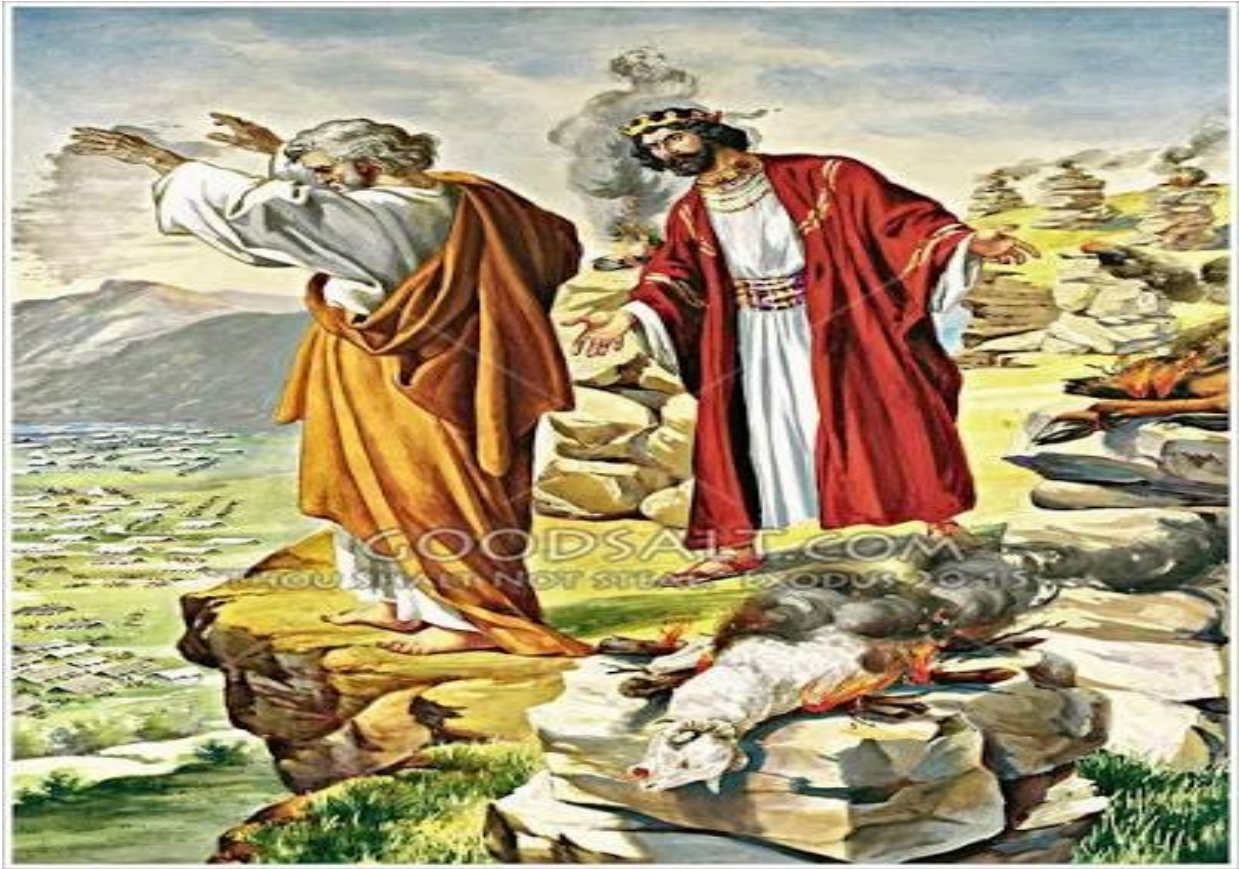




Parshas "Balack"

מתוך 'ליקוטי שמואל'

Editor: Sam. Eisikovits

eisikovits1@gmail.com

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Was Hashem Bilaam's Agent? Doing it for 'The Cause' vs. for the Money

Parshas [Balak](#)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Was Hashem Bilaam's Agent? Doing it for 'The Cause' vs. for the Money

Parshas Balak contains the well-known story of Balak the King of Moav worrying about the imminent approach of the Jewish people. Moav correctly surmised that, given the fate of the other kings and

nations that had challenged Bnei Yisrael with conventional military tactics, Moav would not stand a chance confronting Bnei Yisrael in traditional battle.

Therefore, Balak devised a “secret weapon” – the chemical weapon of his day. “And he sent messengers to Bilaam son of Beor...”

(Bamidbar 22:5) Bilaam could curse. When he did so, the curse would in fact take effect on its intended victim. So Balak requested that Bilaam curse the “nation that has gone out from Egypt and covered the face of the land.”

Bilaam asked the messengers to stay overnight so that he could answer Balak’s request the next morning, based upon what *Hashem* would tell him. *Hashem told* Bilaam, “Do not go with them; do not curse the people, for they are Blessed” (22:12).

Bilaam relayed that message to Balak’s messengers.

When Balak heard that Bilaam would not come, he assumed that the reason was that the proposed compensation was inadequate – that he had tried to get away too cheaply. Therefore, Balak sent a more prestigious delegation, promising Bilaam a great reward and granting his every request.

Bilaam, not being anyone’s fool, casually mentioned to the messengers, “Even if Balak will give me his entire treasury filled with silver and gold, my hands are tied. I can only do that which the *Ribono Shel Olom* permits me to do.” Again, they proceeded through the whole process of waiting overnight.

This time, the *Ribono Shel Olom* told Bilaam, “If these people are coming *likra lecha* (the calling is for you), then go with them – just only speak that which I tell you” (22:20). If we can even use such terminology, it appears as if *Hashem* changed his mind! The first time that Bilaam asked for permission, *Hashem* said, “No. You cannot go!” Then, *Hashem appeared* to suddenly change His mind. What changed?

Rashi explains the words "*Im likra lecha*," that if these people are coming for your benefit – to give you payment, go with them. In other words, if you stand to make profit out of this venture, then I have no objection to your going.

That was the difference! The first time, when they asked Bilaam to come, they did not offer him anything – neither money nor honor. In that situation, *Hashem* told Bilaam, "Do not go." The second time, Balak offered Bilaam wealth and honor. In that situation, *Hashem* told him, "If you stand to gain from this, then you can go."

Is *Hashem* worried about Bilaam's livelihood? Is the *Ribono Shel Olom* acting as Bilaam's agent? Pro bono, you cannot go. If you charge by the hour, then you can go?

I heard a fantastic insight regarding this concept from Rav Shimon Schwab (1908–1995). The difference, says Rav Schwab, is that one of the most potent forces in the universe is doing something "*lishma*" – for its own sake, without ulterior motives. Doing something altruistically, for the sake of what you believe to be right, is a force beyond belief. However, something that is done to make a dollar, rather than for the sake of a cause, loses its potency.

Rav Schwab related this insight in the context of explaining the rise and fall of the Communist system during the previous century. Communism was a very successful movement. Until recently, there were more than a billion and a half people who lived under Communist domination – and yet in recent times, we have seen Communism disintegrate.

What made Communism so successful? Rav Schwab argued that Communism became so successful because there were "*lishma*-niks." People like Lenin and Trotsky and Marx wanted to give the world a better order. They wanted to give the world a new system

to replace the “bankruptcy of capitalism,” in which some people are fantastically wealthy and some beg on the street. In a sense, Communism was based on very noble ideals. These were people who were – for lack of a better word – *l’shem “shamayim”* (for the sake of Heaven)! They did it for the sake of Communism. They were *lishma*!

Rav Schwab related that he remembered a Communist parade in his city in Germany in the 1920s. There was a Jewish boy who had rebelled against his parents and marched in the front line of this parade. He was despised. He was the outcast of the entire community. But this did not faze him, because he did it *lishma*. He believed in what he was doing, like so many of our Jewish brethren, who unfortunately believed in it.

When people are willing to give up their lives and souls for the sake of a cause, it creates a very potent force. We can look back now, over seventy years later, and try to discover what happened to the movement that caused it to collapse. We can suggest that to a large extent, the system failed because it lost this element of *lishma*. When people saw that the leaders of the various “Iron Curtain” countries had stashed away Swiss bank accounts, and when people saw all the corruption and graft, they quickly recognized that the *lishma* had been abandoned. Once they lost the element of *lishma*, the potency of the force was gone.

This is what the *Ribono Shel Olam* was telling Bilaam: When Balak came and said, “Curse the Jews” without offering honor or money, the reason why Bilaam was going was that he hated Jews. “We need to curse Jews! I want to eradicate Jews.” This is a philosophy. It is a **cause**. In that case, “Watch Out! You may not go.” Hashem knows that a sincere **cause** is a lethal and potent force.

However, when Balak said, “I will give you honor and money,” then Hashem told Bilaam: If this is for your own benefit – if you are doing it for the money, then go. That is a different story. If you are “in it” for the money and honor, rather than *lishma* – then your ability will not be nearly as potent.

It Could Happen to You!

Parshas [Balak](#)

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

If It Can Happen To Bilaam, It Can Happen to Any of Us

In Parshas Balak we find an incident which, if we merely stop to think about it, will teach us a tremendous ethical lesson. For me personally, it is one of the scariest mussar teachings that I find in the Torah.

This incident is with a person named Bilaam, who had a tremendous power of speech. Whoever he blessed was blessed; whoever he cursed was cursed. He was a very powerful man — a person who did not command divisions of armies; but he had an almost magical power of speech.

He is asked to employ this power against the Jews. He knows that G-d does not want him to go, but he decides to go nevertheless. While on the way, what happens to him? His donkey stops, refuses to move, then all of a sudden, the donkey opens up his mouth and starts talking to him. Since the history of the world began, such a thing never happened — and never again will happen — that a donkey should talk to a man.

If one would have any doubts whether what he was doing was right or wrong and all of a sudden while driving along, his car would stop and tell him “Don’t go” (and not just one of those recorded voices saying “Your seatbelt isn’t buckled...”) — would

that not cause the person to at least stop and wonder whether he was doing the right thing?

We may ask this question even about a person who was not perceptive. But Bilaam was a wise person; he was a perceptive person. How would a perceptive person view his donkey talking to him?

He should have said to himself, "My strength is my speech. Who gave me that power? G-d. The proof is that the same G-d who gave me the power of speech just gave my donkey the power of speech! *"Who gives a mouth to man or Who makes one dumb..."* [Shemos 4:11] Where is my strength from? There is no bigger miracle of me talking than my donkey talking. It's the same strength of G-d."

What should Bilaam have concluded? That he was not using his power of speech correctly, and he should turn back. Isn't this as clear as day? Isn't the message clear? Shouldn't that make an impression? And yet it didn't.

This is the lesson to be learned — how blind a person can be! When a person has some type of personal motive — whether it be money or power or whatever it is — a person can literally be completely blind. G-d can almost spell it out to him... G-d CAN spell it out to him, but he won't see it!

That is what is so frightening. It can be as clear as day to the objective observer, but the person on his way to sin can not see what is in front of his own eyes! This is terribly frightening, because if it can happen to Bilaam, it can happen to every one of us! If Bilaam can be blinded, we can be blinded.

This is the tremendous mussar to be derived from the incident of Bilaam: There are none so blind, as those who will not see.

Do angels of mercy carry swords?

Written by Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

Hashem became angry that he (Bilaam) went, and He placed an Angel of Hashem on the road to prevent him (22:22)

Rashi explains that the Angel who approached Bilaam was actually an Angel of Mercy.^[1] If so, notes *Rav Pam*, ^[2] it is strange that we find this Angel in a proceeding verse carrying a sword.^[3] What is the Angel of Mercy doing carrying a sword; surely, a sword would be a more suitable for an Angel of Destruction?^[4]

Rav Pam answers that the Angel of Mercy's role is to manifest Hashem's mercy in the world, and as such, he can come in many guises and forms. He is not limited to looking sweet and cheerful, offering good tidings, because his role is to bring about the ultimate good. His job is to stop people from making mistakes and help them lead their lives in the right direction — as such, He may even be wielding a sword — as long as the result is for the person's greater good. In fact, we may not realize at the time that he is in fact a merciful Angel — we may not even realize that he is an Angel. Still, Hashem can put us in any situation where people or situations can command our next move, and whether we know it or not, it's all part of Hashem's ultimate plan for our greater good. To demonstrate this concept, *Rav Yissocher Frand* related that *Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky* applied for a certain Rabbinical position in Europe. Confident that he was most suited for the job, *Rav Yaakov* was very disappointed when he was rejected from the position. Ultimately, he felt that he had no choice but to head to America to find a livelihood. After several positions in America and Canada, he was eventually appointed Rosh Yeshiva of the great Yeshiva Torah Vadaas and soon became one of the *Gedolim* of America.

So we see, said *Rav Frand*, that his rejection, even though he didn't see it at the time, was actually the for *Rav Yaakov's* greater good; for had he stayed in Europe, not only would he likely have not have become the great Rosh Yeshiva and leader of a generation that he became, but he would also have not likely

survived the Nazi onslaught that totally wiped out the entire city where he wanted to serve as the community Rav.

So, when an opportunity passes us by, we should not be too disheartened. We should have confidence that Hashem, Who only wants the best for us, is setting us up for a greater opportunity, and when the time comes, we should be ready to take it with tremendous gratitude for all of our previous “failures” that lead us to this point.

[1] Bamidbar 22:22

[2] Related by Rav Yissocher Frand

[3] Bamidbar 22:31

[4] In fact, Rav Shteinman notes from the Gemora that the Angel of Death carries a sword (Kesuvos 77b)

A Hidden Message to the donkey's Escapades

Written by Benjamin Rose

The Psukim state that Bilam's Donkey went off track three times. The Daas Zekeinim says that Rashi says that these ventures were a Siman of the Avos, and he explains these enigmatic words as follows.

The first time when the Malach blocked the donkey's path it veered off to the “Sadeh” a field. This represents Avrohom who besides for Yitzchok, he had two other sets of children, Yishmael and the Bnei Ketura. The message to Bilam was, if you want to curse Avrohom's children, then go to the right or left to either of these other children, but do not stay on the middle road, which represents Yitzchok.

The second episode was when the donkey went on a narrow path between two walls and squeezed Bilam's leg against the side wall. This narrow road, which had room for only two people, represented Yitzchok's two children, Yaakov and Eisav. The donkey pushed Bilam to one side, telling him he could only curse Eisav and not Yaakov.

The last time, the Malach totally blocked the road and the Donkey had nowhere to go but lie down. This is the children of Yaakov who are all Kadosh V'Tahor and cannot be cursed.

RECITING BALAK TWICE A DAY!?!?!?

Written by Benjamin Rose

We find in Gemara an amazing statement about the Parsha of 'Balak'. The Sages deemed this portion so important that they deliberated if it should be included in the daily prayers – together with the recitation of the Shema. We would be reciting this portion twice a day, were it not for its length, which ChaZaL realized would pose too great a burden for the people. [Berachos 12] What lessons are imparted by the words of the Balaam – a villainous, non-Jewish prophet – that could put them on par with the most fundamental beliefs of Judaism, as expressed in the sublime verse, "Listen, Israel: G-d is our Lord, G-d is One"? The Talmud itself explains that its special message is to be found in one particular verse:

"Israel crouches, lies like a lion, like an awesome lion – who dares rouse him?" [Bam. 24:9] Yes, it's a beautiful verse – but what is so significant, so essential, that for the sake of this verse the entire parasha of Balak deserves to be recited together with the Shema twice daily?

The passages of the Shema teach two fundamentals of the Torah:

- acceptance of God's unity and rule;
- acceptance of His mitzvos.

What ties together these two themes? How are acceptance of God's authority and acceptance of His commandments connected?

The connection comes by way of a third, central concept: the eternal nature of Israel. It is through the mitzvos performed by the Jewish people that God's unity is revealed in the world. The Jewish people were in fact created specifically for this very mission, as it says, "This people I created for Me, (so that) they will relate My praise." [Isaiah 43:21]

Balaam's prophecy declares that the nation of Israel "lies like a lion". G-d constantly watches over the Jewish people, so that they may lie down and sleep with the secure serenity of lions, who need fear no other creature.

The endurance of the Jewish people throughout the generations, despite all odds and laws of history, enables them to persist in their mission of proclaiming God's unity to the world. Their indestructible nature is in itself a cause for sanctification of God's Name.

But if this crucial message is contained in a single verse, why not just add this one verse to the daily prayers?

The Talmud answers that we cannot just add this verse alone to the Shema. The Torah should not be arbitrarily broken up into smaller sections.

If the verse were detached from the rest of Balaam's prophecy, it could be misconstrued as extolling Jewish nationalism for its own sake. The purpose of the unique fortitude of the Jewish people is not for national wealth or military prowess. This verse must be kept in proper context. The eternal nature of Israel is so that they may promulgate G-d's unity in the world, throughout the generations.

May we all sanctify G-d's name and exemplify His Unity in the World!!

Humor

Demolition Tradition

The 100-year-old building that had served as a student residence for a certain yeshiva was about to be demolished. As the wrecker's ball began to strike, one of the students sensed some sadness by one of the yeshiva's rabbis standing nearby.

"This must be difficult to watch," the student said. "The tradition associated with that building, the memories of all the students who lived and studied there. I can't imagine how hard this must be for you."

"It's worse than that," the rabbi replied. "I forgot my cell phone in there."

Divide and Conquer

A Jewish town had a shortage of men of marriageable age, so they had to import men from other towns. One day a groom-to-be arrived on a train, and two mothers-in-law-to-be were waiting for him, each claiming ownership on him.

A rabbi was called in to solve the problem. After a few minutes of thought, he said: "If you both want the groom, we'll cut him in half and give each one of you half of him."

To this the first woman replied, "If that's the only solution rabbi, then do what you have to do."

The rabbi responded. "Ah...this is the real mother-in-law!"

Doctor's Bills

An old Jewish man goes to see one of New York's top medical specialists.

"How much do I owe you doctor?" he asks.

"My fee is \$5000."

"\$5000!" the man exclaims. "That's impossible."

"Fine, in your case," the doctor replies, "I suppose I could make it 3000."

"3000? Ridiculous."

"Well, can you afford 1000?"

"A thousand dollars? Who has that kind of money?"

Frustrated, the doctor says, "Just give me \$800 and we'll be done with it."

"I can give you 200," says the man. "Take it or leave it."

"I don't understand you," says the doctor. "Why did you come to one of the most expensive doctors in New York City if you didn't have any money?"

"Listen, doctor," says the patient. "When it comes to my health, nothing is too expensive."

Don't be a Nudnik

It is date night for Moishe and Miriam Applebaum. They'd gotten ready, dressed in their finest and put their cat Nudnik outside for the night. The taxi arrives, and as Moishe and Miriam walk out of the

house, the cat shoots back in. They don't want the cat shut in the house, so Miriam goes out to the taxi while Moishe goes upstairs to chase Nudnik the cat out.

Miriam, not wanting it known that the house will be empty, explains to the taxi driver "He's just going upstairs to say good bye to my mother."

A few minutes later, Moishe gets into the cab. "Sorry I took so long," he says, "That stupid old Nudnik was hiding under the bed and I had to poke her with a coat hanger to get her to come out!"